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ABSTRACT

This document, one in a series of nine units of study developed for middle and junior high school gifted students outlines an introduction to philosophy based on Mortimer Adler's conceptions. Adler simplified the study of logic into the study of truth, the study of aesthetics to that of beauty, and distilled the study of ethics to the study of goodness. The units focus on these simplified studies: truth, beauty, and goodness. Each of three units presents narrative information followed by suggested activities, topics and readings (including texts, fiction, and poetry). (CL)

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BUCKS COUNTY INTERMEDIATE UNIT #22

Programs for Gifted Students

# TRUTH - BEAUTY - GOODNESS

## Philosophy Units for Gifted Students

(Middle and Secondary Grade Levels)

Developed and Written by Peter Kolman

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# INTRODUCTION

The program or units of study that follow were developed and written by Peter Kolman, a Bucks County Intermediate Unit #22 secondary level teacher of the gifted. They are aimed primarily for use with middle and junior high school gifted students.

The readings, audio-visual materials, and activities listed are meant as suggestions or examples. Teachers implementing this approach are encouraged to make use of other resources, ones perhaps more suitable to their individual needs.

## RATIONALE

Mortimer Adler's book, Six Great Ideas provides an excellent introduction to the area of philosophy for junior high age gifted students. In this lucid book, Adler simplifies the study of philosophy into six great ideas: truth, beauty, goodness and justice, liberty, equality. Adler states that:

> "...the words that name the great ideas are all of them words of ordinary, everyday speech. They do not belong to the private jargon of a specialized branch of knowledge."

This being so, the study of philosophy is now within the realm of the bright junior high school student.

Specifically, philosophy means and includes five fields of study and discourse: logic, aesthetics, ethics, politics, and metaphysics. Traditionally, these areas of study have been considered too complex for use with junior high age children, primarily because they lack background knowledge and vocabulary skills.

Adler has changed all that. He has simplified the study of logic into the study of truth, the study of aesthetics to that of beauty, and distilled ethics to goodness. He focuses the area of politics with his three other great ideas; justice, equality, and liberty. Only metaphysics is left for more advanced study. In short, Adler has provided in his book, Six Great Ideas, an excellent text making possible the comprehensive introduction of philosophy to junior high gifted students.

## UNIT I: TRUTH

"Truth will not make us rich, but it will make us free."
Will Durant

Thinking about truth involves thinking about the whole world we live in - about our knowledge of it, the desires it arouses in us, and the admiration it elicits from us. The study of truth brings into focus man's relationship with the Universe, as well as with other men.

We cannot understand the difference between knowledge and opinion without being aware of how each is related to truth. Adler suggests that "the truth to be found in poetry is not the same as the truth we look for in history, science or philosophy." The criteria of what is true and false changes and varies as we pass from mathematics to the empirical sciences, from the empirical sciences to philosophy, and from philosophy to theology and religion.

The very fact of making judgments is an act that asserts something to be true or false. The nature of the judgments we make cannot be understood without seeking an answer to a fundamental question about radically different modes of truth. Other questions must be asked:

--Does truth exist only in judgments of the mind, or, also, in statements made in language?

--Is there truth in the senses, in memory, in the imagination, as well as the mind?

--Is the kind of truth that makes our reasoning sound the same that makes our judgments valid?

--Is an appeal to experience always the ultimate test of truth?

Adler suggests that an understanding of truth yields insight into a number of other ideas, including:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Experience | Language | Poetry |
| Imagination | Memory | Reason |
| Judgment | Mind | Religion |
| Knowledge | Opinion | |

The study of Truth and its surrounding concepts will enable the student to examine the relationship between the operation of "outer space", the world outside the human mind, and the concept of "inner space", that world within man's mind. Further, this unit forms an introduction to the greater fields of epistemology and structured critical thinking.

Suggested Activities:

1. Broadly speaking, propaganda is any rumor or idea or fact which is spread in order to convince someone of something. Propaganda may be truthful or not, and it is often one-sided. Discuss this concept using the following questions as guidelines:
   a. Is propaganda ever truthful?
   b. Is it ever untruthful?
   c. Does propaganda ever present more than one side of the story?
   d. Can we avoid propaganda entirely?
   e. Is propaganda helpful or harmful?
2. Role play a liar or a skeptic in a classroom forum. Learn to respond to problems as liars and skeptics. Discuss the flaws in both approaches to problems and life.
3. One technique used in propaganda is called "bandwagon". The main idea of the "bandwagon" is to join the group. Others are the "testimonial", that is, using a famous person to "testify" as to the value of something and the "glittering generality", which

emphasizes certain adjectives. Design paragraphs which use these techniques or other propaganda methods. Have students identify what techniques are being used. Evaluate T.V., radio and magazine advertising to locate fallacies in reasoning and distortion of facts. Discuss bias and ethical considerations for advertising.

4. Class members will research philosophers who contributed ideas about truth. Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Locke and Kant, to name a few. Design a chart which shows how these philosophers influenced each other in the development of thinking about truth.

5. Consider the statement: Resolved that truth is always good. What implications and complexities are attached to this proposition?

6. What's in a name? Not much, if you think it has to describe the product or service accurately. Conversely, the name can make the product or service sound very attractive without promising anything. Create some names for products which sound great but promise nothing, i.e., Elite Interior Decorators or Superfast Ice Skates.

Unit Topics and Readings:

Text

Six Great Ideas, M. J. Adler, Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8

The Allegory of the Den, Plato

Fiction

The Bet, Anton Chekhov

By the Waters of Babylon, Stephen Vincent Benet

In Another Country, Ernest Hemingway

The Bear, William Faulkner

Poetry

"Truth Is As Old As God", Emily Dickinson

"The Wayfarer", Stephen Crane

"The Bear", Robert Frost

"When I Heard the Learned Astronomer", Walt Whitman

## UNIT II: BEAUTY

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever."
Keats, in Endymion

Beauty, like truth, cannot be adequately defined. Poetically, the line above clearly expresses a profound truth about the human experience. A thing of beauty is, indeed, a joy forever, whether it be a person, landscape or work of art.

Unfortunately, while such a sentiment is pleasant, it is but a half-truth. In point of fact, people grow old, landscapes change and what is great art to one may be poor art to another. We expect to find beauty in works of art and poetry, these "fine arts". We also expect to find it in nature. Adler believes that "Beauty, like goodness, is thought to inhere in objects we desire or love. It affords us a certain experience of pleasure, one that occurs in the sphere of our knowing rather than in the sphere of our actions." Like "truth", Adler suggests above that the recognition of "beauty" is a learned ideal, one based on knowledge and experience.

In this unit, the student will examine the philosophical implications of beauty and explore the "many kinds of beauty" to be found in the world. Discussion questions include:

--What is pleasure?

--What is the relationship between beauty and the mind of the beholder?

--Are there absolute standards for deciding what is beautiful or aesthetically perfect? If so, what is the source of these standards?

Issues to examine:

--The nature of beauty and ugliness.

--The modern obsession with physical beauty.

--Contrasting cultural ideals of beauty

--Artifice and ornateness as beauty.

--Naturalness and simplicity as beauty.

Adler feels that a study of beauty also casts light on a number of other ideas. These include: Art, Desire, Experience, Imagination, Knowledge, Love, Mind, Pleasure, Pain, Poetry and Sense. This unit, with its emphasis on beauty and art, makes an excellent introduction to the formal study of Aesthetics.

Ideas to be discussed in this unit include: Art, Desire, Experience, Imagination, Knowledge, Love, Mind, Pleasure, Pain, Poetry and Sense.

Suggested Activities:

1. By examining and comparing various art prints, photographs, and objects d' art , students will gain a basic understanding of the visual elements (line, shape, color, texture) and the principles of design (format, unity, balance).
   a. Find the dominant color and textures used in the houses of one area of your community. Do this by listing the color and materials of at least eight houses. Then make a contrast by analyzing eight other houses elsewhere in the community. Finally, explain your opinion of the beauty of the houses you observed.
   b. Observe peoples' clothes. Look for lines, colors and texture which appeal to you. List them.
   c. Observe automobiles. Make a similar list for them involving shape, line and color. Also, consider balance and unity. Decide which models you like most and why. Also, list those models you find unattractive. Be prepared to answer and discuss the question, Why.

2. Prepare to visit a local art museum.

   a. View different forms and genres of art and architecture. Trace the evolution of art forms through time and space. Focus on the changing nature of beauty and art.

   b. Choose two artists: one from either the 17th and 18th century and another from the 19th and 20th century. Examine the differences and similarities of the artists you choose with regard to the following: types of subjects, style, and range of mediums.

3. After viewing the Center for the Humanities sound-slide set, "An Inquiry Into Human Perception: The Nature of Beauty and Ugliness" note and discuss the questions listed in the introduction, i.e., are there changing standards of beauty? List some examples.

4. Using the chapter on beauty from Six Great Ideas, attempt to connect the concept of Beauty with other important concepts that Adler lists, i.e., Art, Desire, Experience, Imagination, Knowledge, Love, Mind, Pleasure, Pain, Poetry and Sense.
   Attempt to illustrate these ideas as they relate to each other.

5. Personal background and society's current standards of beauty will significantly influence judgments of beauty. Devise a chart which compares the student's personal point of view toward a particular object or work of art with that of the classroom consensus (society). Plot where the individual diverges and converges.

6. Discover other persons' ideas about beauty. Interview four persons, two of whom deal directly with beauty:

| | |
|---|---|
| Artist | Commercial Photographer |
| Musician | Architect |
| Sculptor | Craftsman |

Two of whom do not deal directly:

| | |
|---|---|
| Housewife | Engineer |
| Laborer | Bus Driver |
| Salesperson | |

Ask questions such as:

1. What is your definition of beauty?
2. Is ugly the opposite of beautiful?
3. What kinds of pictures are on your walls? Why?
4. How important is beauty in your life?
5. What sacrifices, if any, do you make for beauty?

Record your interviews--attempt to explain differences in your selections.

7. Investigate the field of Aesthetics.

   Choose a philosopher who wrote on this topic and prepare a report to present in a panel discussion. Examine the philosophical positions of various thinkers in their attempts to formulate specific methods for rendering artistic judgments.

Unit Topics and Readings:

Text

Six Great Ideas, M. J. Adler, Chapters 14, 15, and 16

Fiction

The Birthmark, Nathaniel Hawthorne

Young Man Axelrod, Sinclair Lewis

The Chrysanthemums, John Steinbeck

Mac's Masterpiece, Frank O'Connor

Poetry

"Pied Beauty", Gerard Manley Hopkins

"I Died for Beauty", Emily Dickinson

"I Reckon, When I Count at All", Emily Dickinson

"Ten Definitions of Poetry", Carl Sandburg

"Pefit, the Poet", Edgar Lee Masters

"Euclid Alone Has Looked on Beauty Bare", Edna St. Vincent Milley

"Sonnet 18", William Shakespeare

"Sailing to Byzantium", William Butler Yoats

"Ode to a Grecian Urn", John Keats

"Composed Upon Westminster Bridge", William Wordsworth

"In a Station of the Metro", Ezra Pound

Media

An Inquiry Into Human Perception: The Nature of Beauty and Ugliness, Center for the Humanities, White Plains, NY.

## UNIT III: GOODNESS

Man has always aspired to Goodness. Since he has so often, instead, achieved evil this concept needs to be examined more closely. How is it that man desires good but often creates evil? The answer is two-fold. First, man may justify his "evil" acts by calling them "good", as in the case of an Adolf Hitler, or, he may actually fail to make the distinction between "good" and "evil". This confusion is a real and honest one. It is the purpose of this unit to explore the nature of Goodness and to come to grips with some age-old questions.

--What is the "good life"?

--Who is a "good man"?

--What is "good will"?

--What are the supporting conditions of a "good society"?

Adler believes that Goodness illuminates many other important ideas. In alphabetical order, they are:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Desire | Honor | Pleasure |
| Family | Life | Pain |
| Habit | Love | Virtue |
| Happiness | Man | Vice |

Students will pursue in this unit an understanding of "rightness", "goodness", and "wrongness" through discussion and an analysis of the reading assignments. Students will be introduced to critical-thinking techniques to improve judgment skills. Finally, this unit forms the background for the formal study of Ethics.

> "To know the chief rival attitudes toward life...and to have heard some of the reasons they can give for themselves ought to be considered an essential part of liberal education."
>
> William James

Suggested Activities:

1. Goodness

Four men were on a raft in shark-infested waters off a South Sea Island. In a rough squall, Joe was washed overboard. Walt stripped down, preparing immediately to jump in and try to save Joe. Jim and Milt struggled to restrain him. They had no less affection for Joe, but a quick exchange of words expressed their rapid but sincerely weighed decision that the odds were more than fifty percent that with the fury of the waves and the danger of the sharks, neither Joe nor his well-meaning lifesaver would emerge alive. But Walt felt there was a chance, tore himself free from his more prudent companions, jumped in (even though he had a moment of guilty recollection of his wife and four small children - and his inadequate insurance).

from Bishop Pike
You and the New Morality

a. Discuss this question in class: Which was the more (moral) decision, Walt's or that of Jim and Milt?

2. Conduct a panel discussion. Decide what criteria can be used to make good ethical decisions. Choose a philosopher or ethical system as listed below and research this particular point of view. Learn to apply this approach to ethical problems.

a. Hedonism

b. Utilitarianism (John Stuart Mill)

c. Romanticism (Rosseau)

d. Nietzsche and Social Darwinism

e. Sartre and Existentalism

f. Natural Law Ethics (Newton)

g. Situation Ethics

h. Religious Ethics

Debate the statement: Resolved that man is innately evil and that compulsory standards of ethical behavior are a necessity to provide civilization.

3. Written Assignment: An intelligence that is not humane is the most dangerous thing in the world. Plato states "that morality is the effective harmony of the whole". Morality, Jesus taught, is kindness to the weak. Nietzsche believed that "morality is the bravery of the strong". In an essay, defend or attack each of these statements.

4. Aristotle, according to Will Durant in the Story of Philosophy, recognized "that the aim of life is not goodness for its own sake, but happiness". The "Declaration of Independence" gives men the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Prepare a forum presentation to discuss the meaning of happiness.

Unit Topics and Readings:

Text

Six Great Ideas, M. J. Adler, Chapters 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13

Fiction

The Leader of the People, John Steinbeck

Gooseberries, Anton Checkhov

A Simple Heart, Gustave Flaubert

A Good Man is Hard to Find, Flannery O'Connor

Bartle by the Scrivener, Herman Melville

Poetry

"Ulysses", Alfred Lord Tennyson

"Brahma", Ralph Waldo Emerson

'Sonnet 116", William Shakespeare

"My Father Moved Through Dooms of Love", E. E. Cummings

"Channel Firing", Thomas Hardy

"Two Look at Two", Robert Frost

"Karma", Edwin Arlington Robinson

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